The Society for Marine Mammalogy

http://www.marinemammalogy.org

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Rt. Hon. Mr John Key
Prime Minister of New Zealand

Hon. Mr. Nathan Guy
Minister for Primary Industries

Hon. Mr. Nick Smith
Minister of Conservation

Parliament Buildings
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New Zealand

17 April 2013

Dear Sirs

The Society for Marine Mammalogy is the World's largest professional group dedicated to the study of marine mammals, with a membership of approximately 2,000 scientists from 60 countries. Its goal is to facilitate the understanding and conservation of marine mammals and the ecosystems that support them.

I write to you as President of the Society concerning ongoing seismic surveys within the area of protection for Maui's dolphins *Cephalorhynchus hectori maui*. The most recent science indicates that only about 55 individuals of this subspecies remain and government agencies are currently considering protection measures to eliminate deaths in fisheries by removing gillnets and trawling from the protected area.

Like porpoises, these dolphins use high frequency sonar to locate their prey. A recent study of harbour porpoises (Lucke et al. 2009) found them to be more sensitive to auditory damage from seismic testing than any other dolphin or whale. The direct damage to porpoises anticipated to result from a planned seismic project off California, USA resulted in the denial to permit this activity by the California Coastal Commission (see http://documents.coastal.ca.gov/reports/2012/11/W13b-11-2012.pdf). It should be noted that the potential seriousness of the impact of the seismic activity was considered excessive for a stock of over 2,000 individuals that has no current conservation concerns. By comparison, Maui's dolphin is Critically Endangered.

The Society's letter of January this year commended the Department of Conservation and Ministry for Primary Industries for convening an Expert

Panel and preparing a Risk Assessment Report (www.doc.govt.nz/getting-involved/consultations/current/threat-management-plan-review-for-mauis-dolphin) to inform the review.

The letter went on to state:
Scientists from New Zealand and elsewhere have provided an exceptionally strong scientific basis for managing fisheries to prevent the extinction of Maui's dolphins. I trust that you recognize the urgent need to act on that science and strengthen measures to protect these dolphins, which are endemic to North Island waters. Any bycatch of Maui's dolphins is clearly unsustainable and, on behalf of the Society for Marine Mammology, I concur with the IWC recommendation to extend the North Island protected area and the IUCN resolution to ban gillnet and trawl fisheries in all areas where Maui's dolphins are found as critical actions without which this population is highly likely to decline towards extinction.

I encourage you to act quickly and decisively to provide the leadership in marine conservation that the world expects of your country. The Society's biennial international conference will be held in Dunedin later this year – I hope we will be able to receive reports of positive management developments benefiting Maui's dolphins at that time.

We are very concerned that seismic testing is being allowed in the protected area not only because of the risk of direct harm to dolphin hearing but also because potential displacement from this habitat by Maui's dolphins could result in increased bycatch in unprotected areas. Allowing this seismic testing thus appears inconsistent with the New Zealand Government's stated goal of enabling this subspecies to recover. We urge you to reconsider the decision to allow this seismic testing in and near the protected area in light of the high risk to the Maui's dolphin.

Yours sincerely,

Helene Marsh.

Helene Marsh PhD, FTSE

President Society for Marine Mammalogy